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Fact-checking hoaxes and conspiracies about the coronavirus

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By Daniel Funke
January 24, 2020

By Tom Kertscher
January 24, 2020

Falsehoods about a new strain of the coronavirus spreading from China vary widely, from Facebook posts that take a patent out of context to conspiracy theories about Bill Gates. Many of the claims were shared by Facebook and Twitter users, and others were propagated on the fringe internet and notorious conspiracy websites. One falsehood was even shared by a 2020 U.S. Senate candidate.

The virus has infected more than 900 people worldwide, and China has restricted travel within the country amid a rising death toll.

Misinformation about the coronavirus has particularly taken root in Facebook groups for anti-vaccine advocates and believers in QAnon, a broad, right-wing conspiracy theory.

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Many of the posts about coronavirus were flagged as part of Facebook's efforts to combat false news and misinformation on its News Feed. (Read more about our partnership with Facebook.)

PolitiFact sifted through dozens of social media posts and fact-checked a few of the most popular inaccurate claims about COVID-19. If you see suspect claims on your social media feeds, you can send them to truthometer@politifact.com and we'll check it out.

Brad Jorgensen @BradJorgensen8

Replying to @VincenCrypt46

Why does Coronavirus have a patent? Why does ANY virus have a patent? Why is there a vaccine already being developed? U.S. Patent for Coronavirus Patent #10,130,701



(Screenshot from Facebook)

There's a 'coronavirus patent'

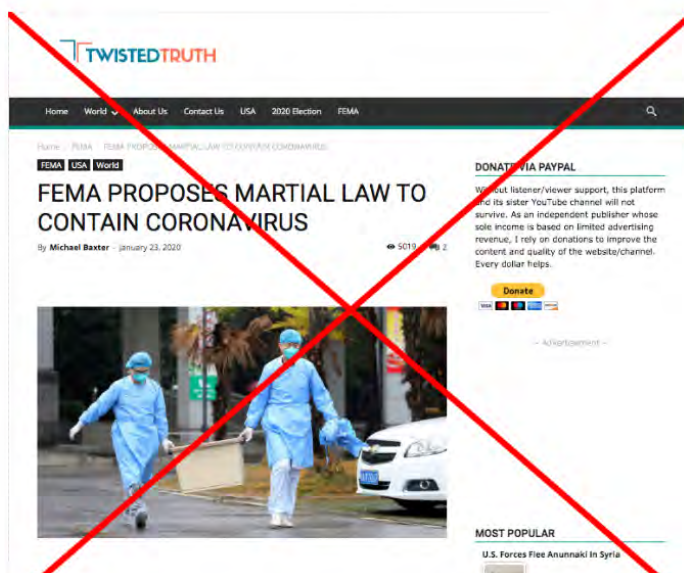
This claim is inaccurate — [we've rated](#) a similar statement Pants on Fire!

Several [Facebook posts](#), [tweets](#), [articles](#) and [YouTube videos](#) allege that a vaccine developed for the coronavirus just as it started to spread earlier this month. Those claims were widely shared in anti-vaccine groups on Facebook, where some users said the disease could be a government plot to vaccinate more people.

"The Coronavirus PATENT is owned by the Pirbright Institute," said Shiva Ayyadurai, a Republican running for U.S. Senate in Massachusetts, [in a Facebook post](#). Ayyadurai [has been associated](#) with a variety of conspiracy theorists and right-wing provocateurs.

As evidence, the posts link to pages for a patent on [Google](#) and [Justia](#). But that patent is related to a form of coronavirus that could potentially be used as a vaccine to prevent diseases in birds and other animals. Pirbright scientists do not currently work on any human coronaviruses.

"There are no vaccines available for any coronaviruses let alone the (Wuhan) one," Amesh Adalja, senior scholar at Johns Hopkins University's Center for Health Security, [told](#) PolitiFact.





(Screenshot from Twisted Truth)

FEMA 'proposes martial law'

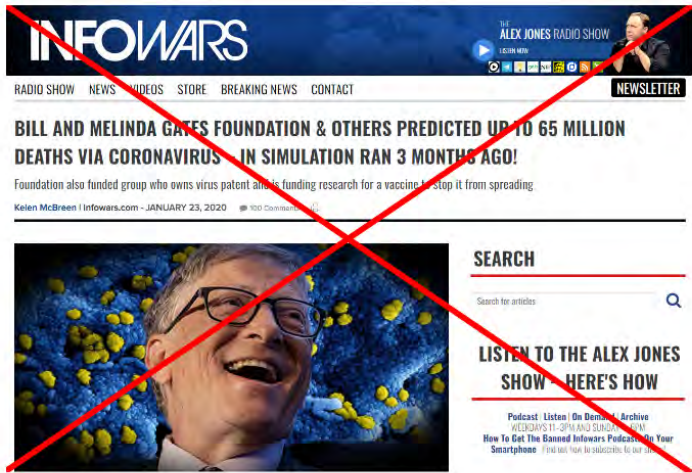
This claim is fabricated.

In an [article](#) published Jan. 23, a website called Twisted Truth wrote that the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency had called on President Donald Trump to impose martial law in the United States, [which would](#) transfer power to the military.

"Acting FEMA Director Pete Gaynor on Wednesday offered President Trump a startling solution, Martial Law in the United States, to prevent the spread of a lethal Chinese Coronavirus that infected hundreds and killed at least 17 people in the Communist nation," the article reads.

The story has been shared more than 570 times on Facebook, according to CrowdTangle, an audience metrics tool. Twisted Truth also published a [YouTube video](#) that has more than 5,000 views. The claim has been amplified by QAnon conspiracy theorists in [blog posts](#) and [threads](#) on 8kun (formerly 8chan), a fringe internet forum that was [briefly taken offline](#) after it was linked to mass shootings in New Zealand and the U.S.

"It's not true — the FEMA director did not advise martial law," Lizzie Litzow, press secretary at FEMA, told PolitiFact.



(Screenshot from InfoWars)

Gates Foundation predicted virus, 'funded group who owns virus patent'

Several [Facebook posts](#), [blogs](#) and [YouTube videos](#) claim that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation predicted, and are somehow profiting from, the coronavirus outbreak. The allegations were circulated widely in QAnon and other conspiracy Facebook groups

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation predicted, and are somehow profiting from, the coronavirus outbreak. The allegations were circulated widely in QAnon and other conspiracy Facebook groups and pages, as well as on 4chan, a fringe internet forum where several high-profile conspiracies [were created](#).

But this claim takes unrelated events and financial connections out of context and morphs them into an inaccurate narrative about the coronavirus.

As evidence, those posts point to financial ties between the Gates Foundation and the United Kingdom-based Pirbright Institute, as well as an event held Oct. 18, 2019.

"The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the World Economic Forum co-hosted an event in NYC where 'policymakers, business leaders, and health officials' worked together on a simulated coronavirus outbreak," reads [an article](#) published by a website called IntelliHub. (PolitiFact [has debunked](#) some of its content before.)

That article was republished [from InfoWars](#), a conspiracy website run by Alex Jones. The outlet [has spread misinformation](#) about victims of the Sandy Hook shooting and the sexual orientation of frogs, for example.

The Oct. 18 [outbreak simulation did happen](#), and [tax records](#) show that the Gates Foundation has supported the Pirbright Institute in the past. The Pirbright Institute owns a patent for a form of coronavirus that could potentially be used as a vaccine to prevent diseases in animals. Pirbright scientists do not currently work on human coronaviruses like the Wuhan strain.

But those disparate facts don't prove that the Gates Foundation has somehow profited from the most recent outbreak of the coronavirus. If anything, they show that the foundation has funded organizations that work to prevent epidemics.



(Screenshot from YouTube)

It's happened. The SHTF! Go to <http://preparewithdavid.com> now!

(Screenshot from YouTube)

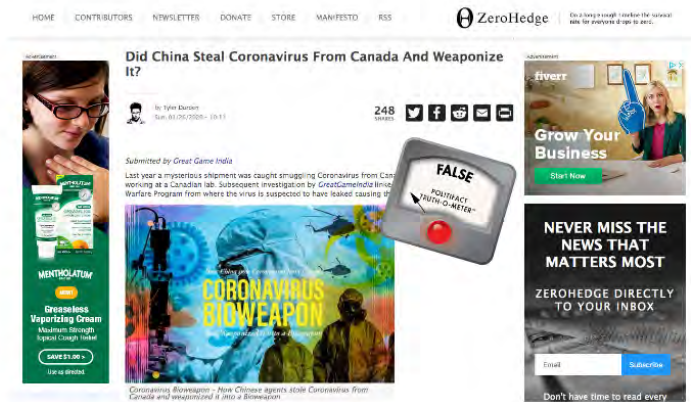
Coronavirus was 'created in a lab' as a 'bioweapon for population control'

These claims are baseless — and they conflate COVID-19 with other strains of the illness. Our friends at Factcheck.org and Health Feedback debunked similar [conspiracy theories](#).

Facebook posts and tabloids have said that COVID-19 was created in a lab, with some going as far as to say that the illness is a "bioweapon for population control." One video created by David Zublick, who has a [history](#) of propagating conspiracies, has more than 12,000 views on YouTube.

"Several news websites, especially alternative news and health websites, are coming under cyberattack for reporting what is a huge story about the fact that this coronavirus that is sweeping China, and which has now spread to other countries — including the United States of America — is actually a biological attack being perpetrated on the United States and other countries," he said in the video.

There is no evidence to support that claim. While its investigation is still ongoing, the CDC [has said](#) the coronavirus appears to have originated at a seafood and animal market in Wuhan, China. From there, it spread via travelers to several Asian countries, France and the United States.



(Screenshot from Zero Hedge)

China 'stole Coronavirus from Canada and weaponized it into a Bioweapon'

This claim is False — it comes from a blog with a [track record](#) of publishing false information.

Zero Hedge said in a [Jan. 26 story](#) that the coronavirus is part of a Chinese plot to develop a bioweapon. The article [was republished](#) from a website called Great Game India.

"Last year a mysterious shipment was caught smuggling

Chinese plot to develop a bio weapon. The article was republished from a website called Great Game India.

"Last year a mysterious shipment was caught smuggling Coronavirus from Canada. It was traced to Chinese agents working at a Canadian lab," the story reads.

The story focuses on the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg. In 2013, researchers there [were investigating](#) a new cluster of coronavirus infections that appeared to have originated in Saudi Arabia.

Great Game India implies that disease is the same one that's currently affecting China. But the lab was examining the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) coronavirus.

The CDC and the World Health Organization are still investigating the cause of the coronavirus outbreak.

[Read our full fact-check.](#)

China will admit virus came from lab 'linked to its covert biological weapon programs'

This claim is False — it comes from a website with ties to Steve Bannon and a Chinese billionaire.

[In an article](#) published Jan. 25, G News wrote that Chinese Communist Party officials would soon "admit that the real source of the coronavirus is from 'a lab in Wuhan (China)' linked to its covert biological weapon programs."

"A reliable source told Miles Guo today that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will admit to the public of an 'accidental' leak of lab-created virus from a P4 lab in Wuhan to put blames on 'human errors,'" the article reads. "But the official announcement is still being finalized."

While we can't know who G News has or hasn't spoken to, we could find no evidence to support the website's story.

No other media reports corroborate G News' story about the source of the coronavirus. There is a lab near Wuhan [that deals](#) with dangerous pathogens — and some [have linked](#) it to China's biological warfare program. But officials are still working to determine the source of the coronavirus outbreak.

Miles Guo, also known as Guo Wengui, is [a Chinese billionaire and political activist](#). He fled China in 2014 in anticipation of corruption charges from the Communist Party. Since then, Wengui, who is a member of President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, has become known for his outspoken criticism of Chinese efforts to weed out corruption.

G News is the media arm of Guo Media, a company linked to Wengui. [Axios reported](#) in October that the company paid Bannon, Trump's former chief strategist and former executive chairman of



G News is the media arm of Guo Media, a company linked to Wengui. [Axios reported](#) in October that the company paid Bannon, Trump's former chief strategist and former executive chairman of Breitbart News, at least \$1 million for "strategic consulting services." Both Bannon and Wengui have their own sections on G News.

[Read our full fact-check.](#)

There are 'reports of 10,000 DEAD in Wuhan'

We rated this claim Pants on Fire!

It comes from a Jan. 24 [story from the](#) Geller Report. The website is run by Pamela Geller, an activist who co-founded Stop Islamization of America, a far-right group.

"CORONAVIRUS: Reports of 10,000 DEAD in Wuhan, China," the story reads. It has been shared more than 2,000 times on Facebook.

First, the Geller Report article is questionably sourced. It says that a guy named Bill Holter heard from a friend named Robert who heard from an American friend who heard from a Chinese friend who has relatives in Wuhan that "there may already be ~10,000 dead there from the virus."

But here's what we know from credible sources about [COVID-19](#):

[According](#) to a Jan. 26 report from the World Health Organization, more than 2,000 people have contracted the virus, the vast majority of whom live in China. More than 100 people in the United States are being evaluated for possible infection.

The Agence France-Presse, in a report carried by CBS, [said](#) the death toll, according to Chinese authorities, had reached 106. The South China Morning Post also [reported](#) the 106 figure and attributed it to Chinese authorities.

It's certainly possible that the actual death toll is higher than reported. But we found no corroboration for it being near 10,000,

[Read our full fact-check.](#)

This article was updated Jan. 28 with more fact-checks.

Correction (Jan. 28, 2020): A previous version of this article stated that the Pirbright Institute has a patent for the SARS coronavirus. In fact, the institute's patent covers a form of coronavirus that could potentially be used as a vaccine to prevent diseases in birds and other animals. Pirbright scientists do not currently work on any human coronaviruses.

Update (March 11, 2020): We've updated this article to include the specific name of the 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19).



space (March 23, 2020). He repeated this phrase to include the specific name of the 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19).

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MORE BY DANIEL FUNKE

 **Facebook posts**
stated on March 31, 2021 a video:
"mRNA is not a vaccine" — it's "actually an operating system" that's run by Bill Gates to program humans.




By Daniel Funke • April 1, 2021

 **Facebook posts**
stated on March 24, 2021 a post:
"Suez Canal blocked by huge container ship named Evergreen. Evergreen shipping is most likely a cover for human and sex trafficking" by Hillary Clinton.



By Daniel Funke • March 25, 2021

 **Jack Posobiec**
stated on March 23, 2021 a tweet:
"New information coming in that Boulder shooter was a Syrian refugee who arrived via Obama-era asylum programs."



By Daniel Funke • March 24, 2021

FACT-CHECKING HOAXES AND CONSPIRACIES ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS



Viral image

stated on October 23, 2021 in a Facebook post:

Photos show Manila Bay before and during Rodrigo Duterte's administration.

By Ciara O'Rourke • October 28, 2021



Viral image

stated on October 26, 2021 in an Instagram post:

"79.4% of babies who die of 'SIDS' had a vaccine the same day."

By Tom Kertscher • October 28, 2021



Instagram posts

stated on October 26, 2021 in an Instagram post:

Says Dr. Anthony Fauci planned the AIDS epidemic.

By Tom Kertscher • October 28, 2021



Viral image

stated on October 28, 2021 in a Facebook post:

"Biden resigned, Pelosi was detained."

By Ciara O'Rourke • October 28, 2021



Viral image

stated on October 23, 2021 in an Instagram post:

Photo shows Sheryl Crow wearing a shirt that says, "Keep America Trumpless."

By Ciara O'Rourke • October 28, 2021



Facebook posts

stated on October 27, 2021 in social media posts:

President Joe Biden withdrew troops from Afghanistan "simply because of Trump Derangement Syndrome and they wanted to reverse any policy that Trump had implemented."

By Louis Jacobson • October 28, 2021



implemented.”

By Louis Jacobson • October 28, 2021



Tom Tiffany

stated on August 8, 2021 in Twitter:

“The seasonal cold and flu is actually more dangerous for kids than the Coronavirus” and “there is very low transmissibility from children to their families and communities.”



By Allison Garfield • October 28, 2021



Viral image

stated on October 21, 2021 in an Instagram post:

“Indiana State Police offers to hire Chicago officers who REFUSE TO COMPLY with vax mandate.”



By Ciara O'Rourke • October 27, 2021



Byron Brown

stated on September 9, 2021 in a debate:

“Three percent is not a modest tax increase, if you own a \$100,000 home in the city of Buffalo, that means an extra \$300 a year.”



By Jill Terreni Ramos • October 27, 2021



Facebook posts

stated on October 26, 2021 in a Facebook post:

A White House photographer took a picture of Donald Trump at the White House on Oct. 24.



By Ciara O'Rourke • October 27, 2021

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